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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE, NEA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/04/2018

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT CHRISTOFIAS BEHIND CYPRUS'S CONDEMNATION
OF ALLEGED U.S. RAID

REF: NICOSIA 860

Classified By: Ambassador Frank C. Urbancic, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) The Cypriot Foreign Ministry on October 31 condemned the alleged October 26 U.S. raid on Al Qaeda Iraq targets in eastern Syria via a press release and website posting (Reftel). In a November 4 meeting with PolChief, Middle East Desk Officer Dionysus Dionysiou explained MFA thinking in adopting its position. "Respect for territorial integrity and the inviolability of international borders underpins Republic of Cyprus foreign policy," Dionysiou related. That the attack had occurred in Cyprus's backyard and looked potentially destabilizing made it imperative to issue a statement. He assured that the message was not motivated by anti-American sentiments within the Ministry, claiming that "we would have said the same regardless of who the victims or aggressors were." Cyprus was not alone in criticizing the U.S. attack, he continued, pointing to a similar-sounding October 27 communiqué from French President Nicholas Sarkozy. The French document was of paramount importance, he asserted, since it represented the "credible sourcing" the Cypriots had needed to go public with their own condemnation (Note: the French statement calls for ascertaining the facts, but does not condemn the action).

¶2. (C) Pressed on process, Dionysiou, who had penned the message, revealed that orders to prepare it had come from the Palace. President Demetris Christofias apparently had seen a press report that Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan telephoned Syrian President Bashar Assad on October 27 to discuss the "border violation" and express condolences for the civilian victims. Believing it imperative not to allow Turkey to win Syria's sympathies to the detriment of Cyprus, the President wanted to write to Assad personally. "Believe me," Dionysiou argued, "that letter would have been far harder on the U.S. than the press release was."

¶3. (C) The MFA diplomat repeatedly urged the U.S. not to read much into the statement -- Cyprus was not intending to engage in a campaign of U.S.-bashing, he insisted. It did, however, have every intention of repairing relations with Syria, lately strained because of ferry connections between Latakeia and "occupied" northern Cyprus. Christofias would pay an official visit to Damascus some time in 2009, Dionysiou reported. There, the President would try to convince Assad that Syria could establish and maintain closer ties to Turkey without damaging Cypriot interests in the process -- "just like Israel does now," Dionysiou reasoned.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Notwithstanding the relatively junior MFA

official's assurances, RoC President Christofias's foreign policy priorities are beginning to show an uncomfortable pattern consistent with his far-left ideology. In the last two months, we've seen the Foreign Minister travel to Havana and announce establishment of an RoC embassy there, the Council of Ministers agree to the opening of a Venezuelan Embassy in Nicosia, and now this latest Syria salvo. The Embassy is not alone in questioning the President's aims and motivations, as contacts in almost all parties except Christofias's AKEL are fretting over the message that such maneuvers send to the Cypriot public and Cyprus's EU allies. The President continues to garner high ratings in public opinion polls, however.

Urbancic